

Heights remained unoccupied by Federal troops, it was not until May 24th that the Government was able to spare a sufficient force to take possession of that commanding position. Alexandria was occupied at the same time.¹ No opposition was encountered at either place. Both sides were, it must be remembered, unprepared for war, and (it may well be believed) neither side was anxious to precipitate hostilities. The erection by the Confederates of batteries on Arlington Heights would have involved an immediate conflict for the possession of Washington, which General Lee, who, at that time, directed military operations in Virginia, was not ready to begin. But, while it was optional with the Confederates to refrain from occupying the heights which dominated the Federal capital, it was a matter of vital necessity for their antagonists to hold and fortify them. The security of "Washington" was by universal admission of the first importance; no one denied that the loss of the capital would most seriously compromise the Federal cause.

Washington, however, having been rendered safe from direct attack, and troops having arrived from the North in considerable numbers, a not unnatural desire sprang up in the public mind to try conclusions with the army at Manassas. It

was urged
against such a course that the three
months* troops,
who constituted by far the greater part
of the avail-
able force, were nearing the end of the
term of their
service, and therefore could hardly be
depended on

¹ General McDowell's plan was to go on to Manassas* at
once. C. W.
129. Why it was not carried out does not appear,